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Iwata Asks

Iwata Asks is a series of interviews conducted by former Nintendo Global President **Satoru Iwata** with key creators behind the making of Nintendo games and hardware.

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The Previous Game Felt As Though We'd Given Our All

Iwata

All right, to start off, please introduce yourselves.

Aonuma

I'm Aonuma, from Entertainment Analysis & Development. I produced this game, The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks, and I also produced the previous game, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass.¹

Iwamoto

I'm Iwamoto, of the same department. I acted as director for this game, as with the previous game.

1. The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass is a stylus controlled action-adventure game, and the first Nintendo DS title in the The Legend of Zelda series. It was released in June of 2007.

Iwata

Aonuma-san, you're involved with both the Wii and Nintendo DS editions of The Legend of Zelda. Are there any differences in how you work on the two?

Aonuma

When I work on the Wii edition, I'm right on-site, and I often do my job from a director's perspective. On the Nintendo DS version, I do proper producer's work. ...That said, when I worked on the previous game, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, I was simultaneously making Twilight Princess², so I couldn't keep a very close eye on things right from the beginning. Then, when The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess was finished and I went to the Nintendo DS version's office, the development was already pretty far along. From my point of view, it was at a stage where I could really make myself useful.

2. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess is an action-adventure game that was released in December of 2006 as software for both the Wii and GameCube systems.

Iwata

So you're saying that you left the site for a while, and that let you see the Nintendo DS version with a new set of eyes. As a result, you were able to spot the places where you could put in a little more work and really improve things.

Aonuma

That's exactly it. So then - and I did feel bad to do so - I asked that development be extended three more months, and I worked on it during that extra period. Then, the more I worked, the better it got.



**Iwata**

Yes, I'd heard something about that, too. I heard that the quality of the previous game improved tremendously during the final stages of development.

Aonuma

And then we had Iwamoto direct this time just as he did with the last game. About half of the staff had been involved in The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass as well, so I left matters in their hands to a certain extent. And, again, for about the final two months of development...

Iwamoto

It was closer to three.

Aonuma

As you'd expect, I went back in right in the final stages of development, as I had with the previous game. I'd lobbed out several proposals, and when I came back, the results I've gotten were far better than I'd hoped for. I think I must have played the game through about ten times from there on. (laughs) I was making the final balance adjustments.

Iwata

The producer says it was far better than he'd hoped for. Director Iwamoto, how did this project begin?

Iwamoto

To start with, in the previous work, we'd included a lot of different features. Personally, I felt as though we'd really done our best. We built in all sorts of ways to play, using the Nintendo DS handheld's functions. But then Producer Aonuma said, "There's still quite a lot left to do here, isn't there?"

**Iwata**

Even though you've done all you could (laughs).

Aonuma

You see, though, I did feel the same way. In the previous game, there was a tremendous amount

of ideas, and even I felt very strongly that we'd done absolutely everything.

Iwata

Since you both felt that you'd done everything there was to do, what made you decide to make another The Legend of Zelda for Nintendo DS?

Aonuma

Well, there are some definite similarities between that sequence of events and the way The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask³ came from The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time⁴.

Iwata

That's right, the situation now is similar to the way things were with the N64.

3. The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, is a Nintendo 64 game. It was released in April of 2000 (Japan), a year and five months after The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time appeared.

4. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time was the first game in the The Legend of Zelda series to be made 3D. It was released in November of 1998 for the Nintendo 64.

Aonuma

Very similar. If I start telling that story, though, we could be here for a while. Is that all right?

Iwata

Of course, please, go on. I doubt it's even possible to talk about "The Legend of Zelda theory without mentioning that story.

Aonuma

All right. Our first 3D The Legend of Zelda game for the N64 turned out to be The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. I did some direction on that one, although it was only partial: I was in charge of dungeon design.

Iwata

Somehow, I had the impression that you'd been overseeing everything since Ocarina of Time, Aonuma-san. Now that I think about it, I guess that wasn't the case.

Aonuma

Absolutely not. I managed to stay out of the line of fire most of the time back then. (laughs)

Iwata

(laughs)

Aonuma

Well, and they pretty much let me do whatever I pleased. So when we made The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, I felt very strongly that we'd given it our best.

Iwata

When The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time came out, people said it was far above the average level of games at the time, so I'm sure you did feel you'd done your best.

**Aonuma**

That's right. It made us very, very happy (laughs). Even after its release, I felt that we'd really done something special; I felt very fulfilled. At the time, I think (Shigeru) Miyamoto-san had that same feeling, but apparently he also felt as though there was still quite a lot left to do.

Iwata

Yes, Miyamoto-san really is greedy about things like that, isn't he. (laughs)

Aonuma

And so he said: we'd already made 3D models for The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. By changing the situation, couldn't we make new ways to play, a new story?

Iwata

So you made The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask.

Aonuma

No, we didn't just start making The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, not right away. There was actually a flip-side, and in the beginning, the idea was to make a "Ura (Flip-Side) Zelda".

Iwata

That "Ura Zelda" (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: Master Quest) was developed for the 64DD⁵. Ultimately, we recorded it on a limited edition disc that went to people who reserved The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker⁶

5. The 64DD was a Japan-only Nintendo 64 peripheral sold by RandnetDD. Service began in 1999 and ended in 2001.

6. "Limited Campaign Disc": A limited-edition bonus distributed to those who pre-ordered The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, which was originally released in December of 2001. It was a GameCube disc, and contained The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: Master Quest, and footage from the latest games (in some regions).

Aonuma

Ultimately, other staff members handled The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: Master Quest. Still, as someone who has been in charge of the dungeons, I just couldn't get that excited over making a flip-side for them. I couldn't see it turning into a new The Legend of Zelda, either. But we'd been told to make The Legend of Zelda. It isn't as though we could just say, "I don't want to", and end it there. At that point, Miyamoto-san gave us a tradeoff: he said, if we could make a new The Legend of Zelda game in one year, then it wouldn't have to be a "flip-side".



Iwata

Well! So you're saying The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask was the result of your team picking up the gauntlet he'd thrown down? (laughs)

Aonuma

Yes. That was the deal. But The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time did take three years to make, you know!?

Iwata

That it did (laughs).

Aonuma

And we were supposed to make its sequel in a year... At first, we had absolutely no idea what sort of thing we were supposed to make, and we just kept expanding our plans... At that point, the "Three-Day System"⁷, the idea of a compact world to be played over and over again, came down from Miyamoto-san and one other director, (Yoshiaki) Koizumi-san⁸. We added that to the mix, and then, finally, we saw the full substance of a The Legend of Zelda game we could make in one year.

Iwata

Actually, I feel as though, back then, we were given a glimpse of the concept that "Deep, compact play is one form of the games of the future". I think in that sense, as a product, The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask was a big turning point for Nintendo. That said, I had no idea it was the result of an argument. (laughs)

Aonuma

That's correct. (laughs) Still, in the beginning, it was all trial and error. Ultimately, we adopted the "three-day system", and made it so that, if you couldn't clear the game inside of three days, the world was destroyed.

Iwata

It turned out to be a very tense game, didn't it.

7. After The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, Yoshiaki Koizumi was involved in the development of "Super Mario Sunshine" (2002), "Super Mario Galaxy" (2007), and other 3D Mario games, and in the Nintendo DSiWare "Flipnote Studio" (2008). He is affiliated with the Tokyo production office.

8. The Three-Day System: In this system, after three days of in-game time, the moon falls to earth and the world is destroyed. For that reason, the player must control that time and advance the game while repeating those three days, over and over.

Aonuma

Then, in The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, you had to remember all sorts of things so that the world wouldn't be destroyed: "Oh, there was something here, and something else over there", things like that. That's another thing it shares with The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks.

Iwamoto

You're traveling by train, and if you're careful to remember where things are, they come in handy later.

Aonuma

And this time, since it's on the Nintendo DS system, you can take notes.

Iwata

It's very odd that something you worked so hard to think up should come in handy again now, almost ten years later. (laughs)

Aonuma

It is. (laughs)

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Why Tetra Makes No Appearance

Iwata

So, even though you felt you'd done everything you could with The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time, The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask came out of it. Now, in the same way, you progressed from The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass into making The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks.

Aonuma

That's right. After we made Ocarina of Time, and Miyamoto-san said, "There are still things you can do, aren't there"... I think those words came back again, inside me.

Iwata

It's just like the way an apprentice thinks, "How cruel", but then ends up doing the same thing to his apprentices. (laughs)

Aonuma

It really is. (laughs) Now that I think about it, it's a rather inhumane story.

Iwamoto

(Laughs)

Aonuma

But we did manage it with The Legend of Zelda:Majora's Mask. So I said, "You people can do it too!" Also, "This is a sequel, so you'll be able to make it fast, won't you."

Iwamoto

He did say that (laughs).

Iwata

Iwamoto-san, do you mean your producer urged you, "We got The Legend of Zelda:Majora's mask finished in a year, so come on, let's do this in a short time frame, too"?

Iwamoto

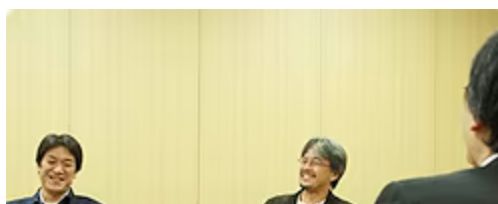
No, he didn't go that far. (laughs)

Aonuma

I didn't. (laughs)

Iwamoto

He didn't say it, but... He might as well have. (laughs)





Aonuma

Besides, this game had a two-year development period.

Iwamoto

Two years... isn't really all that much. (laughs)

All

(laugh)

Aonuma

To begin with, Director Iwamoto was on the The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time staff as well.

Iwata

That's true.

Iwamoto

I've been involved in the The Legend of Zelda series since The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, but I wasn't in charge of The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask. So I didn't know how rough The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask really was, and when Aonuma-san said, "There are still things to do here, aren't there", it didn't really throw me for a loop.

Iwata

Since you felt you'd really done your best, then, you also felt that you could keep going.

Iwamoto

Right. We thought, "What if we go at this using a different approach from the previous game?" And what we came up with was the use of Phantom.

Iwata

A strong, invincible enemy.

Iwamoto

Yes. In the last game, there was a type of play where you could switch to playing as a Goron; we decided to build things around controlling the Phantom at a relatively early stage. We'd been trying to think of a method for intuitively and easily controlling a subplayer for a while at that point.

Iwata

In other words, even before you were told, "There are still things to do here, aren't there", you'd had an idea that you really wanted to try.

Aonuma

That's why, when I said, "Let's do another one!", I got such a good response. Something in each of us sort of resonated with the other.

Iwamoto

No, well.... Was there something? (staring at each other)

Aonuma

You seem annoyed. (laughs)

All

(laugh)

Iwata

By the way - and I'm asking this because history does tend to repeat itself - was there an argument before this game, as there was with The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask?

**Aonuma**

I don't think either of us really tried to pick a fight... Did we?

Iwamoto

No. (laughs)

Aonuma

Only, Iwamoto-san directed The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, but it wasn't a completely original work as far as he was concerned.

Iwamoto

That's true. We had The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker⁹ to start from, and we also did things like bringing the boat play over to Nintendo DS.

Iwata

I see. The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass felt quite original to me, but the boat parts are similar at their base levels, and they were expressed through the application of a method you created for The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker.

9. The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker" is an action-adventure game for GameCube, originally released in December of 2002.

Aonuma

Even as he applied it, he searched like mad for things he wanted to tinker with and improve from The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker.

Iwata

I see.

Aonuma

And the results really paid off for The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass. So for Spirit Tracks, I think he wanted to be free to make things he'd thought of on his own... Is that about right?

Iwamoto

Yes (laughs).

Aonuma

Then, among the characters who appear this time, we really focus on Princess Zelda.

Iwata

Tetra showed up in the last game, didn't she.

Aonuma

Yes, but she doesn't in this one. Back when I heard the story's rough outline, I asked, "What? Why isn't Tetra making an appearance?" And he said, "Well... I don't like Tetra all that much."

All

(explosive laughter)

Aonuma

"What do you mean, you don't like her!?" "Don't cause me trouble, now. You mustn't say things like that..." That's about how the exchange went. (laughs)

Iwamoto

(laughs) But it wasn't that I didn't like her so much as that I was enthusiastic about characters in my own way. I was searching for something that hadn't been portrayed much, and there was Princess Zelda. At first, we hadn't settled on the subcharacter, and I discussed several things with the staff. Then we thought that, since they're adventuring together, it would be better to have it be a girl. But, you know, we couldn't have it be Tetra every time, so we started to consider introducing a new character. The thing is, though, it's "The Legend of Zelda". I thought it wouldn't be much fun if Princess Zelda didn't show up and if we brought in some unrelated princess instead, so, in the end, I asked for permission to use Princess Zelda.



Iwata

And what was Aonuma-san's answer?

Iwamoto

Um... "Whatever. Just do what you want."

Aonuma

What!? I didn't say it like that!

All

(explosive laughter)

Iwata

There, you see? There was an argument! (laughs)

Aonuma

I said, "Why don't you try it?" Politely. Didn't I?

Iwamoto

Did you?

Aonuma

Oh, quit making trouble for me... (laughs).

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Play That's Only Possible on a Train

Iwata

...About the train.

Aonuma

I knew that was coming. (laughs)

Iwamoto

We were sure you were going to ask that. (laughs)

Iwata

Does somebody like trains? Before I discovered video games, back when I was in middle school, I was absolutely crazy about trains. There were steam locomotives which ran in Hokkaido and were about to be decommissioned, and I went up there and tracked it down so I could get photos, and I collected model trains.... Things like that. Was there a railroad fan on the development staff?

Aonuma

No railroad fans.

Iwamoto

There weren't any at first.

Iwata

What do you mean, "at first"?

Iwamoto

Well, of course, while we were researching trains, some of the staff members got interested in them.

Aonuma

But at first, we didn't have a single railroad fan. At the beginning, since we were making a new The Legend of Zelda, I put out a proposal. I said, "This time, why don't we do away with the ship? Instead, let's have a big, "The Legend of Zelda -like" development, where you rush across the land of the wide world, headed to some place you've never been."

Iwata

So boats were out completely.

Aonuma

Right. No boats allowed (laughs). I think it's fun to have a new land becoming clearer and clearer right before your eyes, and have all sorts of different developments open up. It piques your sense of adventure, too. But then we had to think about what to use as a mode of transportation, in place of a boat, and at that point, I remembered a certain picture book.

Iwata

A picture book?

Aonuma

...Which I brought with me today...



Iwata

This book? "The Tracks Go On"?¹⁰

10. "The Tracks Go On" - A picture book published by Kin-no-hoshi sha Co., Ltd. in 2003. Story by Fumiko Takeshita, art by Mamoru Suzuki.

Aonuma

My son loved this book. When he was four or five, this was the book he'd bring me every night before bed. "Read it, Daddy, read it." In the book, the children keep on...

Iwata

(flipping through the book) ...Laying the tracks.

Aonuma

They come across all sorts of things, and, for example, when they find a mountain...

Iwata

...they dig a tunnel. When they come to a river, they build a bridge...

Aonuma

When they come to a road...

Iwata

They build a railroad crossing.

Aonuma

Up until there, it's an ordinary story.

Iwata

Yes.

Aonuma

But this is where it gets interesting. They come across a great big pond. And there are animals there, so they start wondering what to do. And what they do is...

Iwata

Oh, they go around it. To protect the animals.

Aonuma

I love that. (laughs) At that point - and since I read it to him every night, I'm sure my son knew the answer too, but I asked anyway - I always asked, "What do you think they'll do?"

Iwata

You like the way they detour around the pond instead of filling it in and going over it.

Aonuma

We'd get to that part, the "punch line", and then I'd put him to bed. That was the routine. Then, at the very end...

Iwata

They make a station.

Aonuma

Yes. And then a train comes. And everybody gets on it and goes home. That's the story. It's a very simple one, but the pioneering spirit, the kids building the railroad... Something about it seemed as though it would fit with The Legend of Zelda But I didn't tell the staff about this book.



Iwata

Even though you'd gotten the idea from it, you kept it secret.

Aonuma

That's right (laughs). I didn't tell them about the book, I only said, "Let's make it a train." And then, "Let's make it so that you can lay the tracks yourself." I brought it up, and we started from that experiment.

Iwata

I see.

Aonuma

But, at first, when I thought it up, I was very casual about the whole thing. I'd say "It would be fun if we could lay the tracks, wouldn't it!", things like that.

Iwamoto

We all said that, didn't we? Cheerfully. (laughs)

Aonuma

But that turned into a bit of a nightmare. Because, you know, the actual laying of the tracks is a real pain. In the book, it's over in a few pages, but as you'd expect, trying to do it in a game is tough. And I just casually tossed the proposal out there. It was pretty unwise of me...

Iwamoto

Well, but when the rest of us heard your idea, we thought it would be a lot of fun to lay the tracks any way you liked, to be able to travel anywhere at will.

Iwata

So at first, the staff members thought laying the tracks would be fun as well.

Iwamoto

Right. But the problem is that, even if people can lay the tracks anywhere they like, they won't know where to lay them. Then, to make the story work, there are places where you absolutely mustn't go, and other places where you really can't be at certain points in time. So we examined all sorts of different ways of playing. That went on for about a year.

Iwata

A whole year? But your development period was two years...

Iwamoto

We spent half of those two years on the railroad. And then, one day, Aonuma-san said, "Why don't we just drop the idea of laying the tracks?"

Iwata

At first, you started development from the angle of making it possible for players to lay the tracks anywhere they wanted, and then, one year later, Aonuma-san said, "Let's not"... How did the team handle that?

Iwamoto

Well...

Iwata

Did it feel as though a small tea table had been upended?

Iwamoto

Not... a small one. A pretty giant one (laughs).



Iwata

Well, you'd spent a year making it, and then it just went south on you. How did you fix it?

Aonuma

In this world, the tracks were there to begin with, but for some reason they've been erased. The player has to put them back to the way they were.

Iwamoto

In other words, somebody's erased these tracks, and Link brings them back together, little by little.

Aonuma

Then, we remade it that way, and when we took it to the monitor, lots of people said, "It's easy to understand and easy to play".

Iwata

If you're completely free, you don't know quite what to do. If your goal is clear, I'd guess that makes it a lot easier to play.

Aonuma

Yes. With the railroad tracks, there's a clear route, and people said it was really fun to work on steadily expanding them. So I thought, "Well, I had that part right." (laughs) But on the other hand, some people in-house felt that the freedom may be lost. But even if the destination is set, there's a freedom in the expansion.

Iwata

So there's an increase in a different sort of freedom.

Aonuma

That's right. Not only that, we stumbled on a new way to play. What if you're racing down the tracks, and something comes barreling towards you from the front?

Iwata

You've got to avoid it somehow.

Aonuma

Right. But all the railroad tracks are single lines. So you can't avoid it, you'll have to crash into it. And there are some trains that will definitely defeat you, if you run into them.

Iwata

So there's no way to run (laughs).

Aonuma

We made it possible to brake and back up, and to switch to another track when you come to a fork. You get through spots like that by using your head.

Iwata

I see. You can try backing up first, then switching to another track, and going on again once the enemy train's passed you.

Iwamoto

That's right. The tracks the other trains will be traveling on are marked on your map, so you can think, "If I wait here patiently, he'll go that way", and time your advances.

Aonuma

Play like that wouldn't be possible without a train.

Iwamoto

We felt a real pull from that sort of play, so we were very thorough when we made those areas of the game.

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Customizing the Train

Iwata

Why did you subtitle it Daichi no Kiteki (Japanese meaning Train Whistle of the Wide World)"?

Aonuma

That comes from Director Iwamoto's name. Abbreviate "Daichi no Kiteki", and you get "Daiki".

Iwamoto

No, don't listen to him. That wasn't the reason. (laughs)

Iwata

(laughs)

Aonuma

We settled on the "Train Whistle" part very quickly. Of course it refers to the train's whistle, and then this game has one of The Legend of Zelda characteristic sound items in it, too.

Iwamoto

Players can use a pan flute ¹¹ this time.

11. Pan flute - Also called "pan pipes", they are said to be the world's oldest instrument. Made of grasses, bamboo or wood, they are found all over the world. However, at present, the ones from Romania and the Andes are particularly famous.

Aonuma

Since that's the case, we considered using "Pan Flute of the (something)" as a subtitle, but it would have been a bit long. Besides, you can use the pan flute, but it isn't a main item. Then, if you say "train", "train whistle" follows automatically, and a pan flute is also a "whistle", so we thought it might work for both.

Iwamoto

That's why we decided to use "Train Whistle", but we weren't sure what to do about the "something" in "Train Whistle of the (something)". That one gave us quite a headache.

Aonuma

Then, The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks was decided as the subtitle for the North American edition, before we'd found ours. "Spirit" means "soul", so we took that and tried "Train Whistle of the Soul". But that made it sound kind of creepy, possibly haunted (laughs). We were making a pleasant game about running a train across wide-open spaces, and we just didn't think it fit.

Iwamoto

Finally, we asked for suggestions from the staff and wrote them all on a white board, and from those suggestions, we narrowed it down to "Train Whistle of the Wide World".

Aonuma

What finally decided it was the sound. When I said, "Train Whistle of the Wide World", it just

rolled off the tongue.



Iwamoto

And it was easy.

Aonuma

Then, after we'd decided on "Train Whistle of the Wide World" amongst ourselves, we sent an e-mail to Miyamoto-san, asking him what he thought of it. And he just answered, "I think it's good".

Iwata

"I think it's good" is a pretty short answer. What did you think when you got that back?

Aonuma

It really did feel like he was brushing us off. So we asked him again, "Are you sure you're taking this seriously?", and he said, "Of course I am. My first impression was that it was good, so I said 'I think it's good!'" (laughs).

Iwata

And if something's bad, he does say it's bad (laughs).

Aonuma

Absolutely. When something's bad, he really lets you know about it (laughs).

Iwata

When something's no good, there are always lots of reasons why it's no good, but when it is good, you don't really need reasons, you know. Still, not having him say anything must have made you a bit nervous.

Aonuma

It did that (laughs). Miyamoto-san was probably busy with the New Super Mario Bros. Wii¹².

12. New Super Mario Bros. Wii - An action game for Wii released on November, 2009.

Iwata

And you think he might have been distracted? (laughs)

Aonuma

But anyway, that's how we decided on "Train Whistle of the Wide World", and we took to it very quickly. It never felt strange to us.

Iwamoto

We got used to it, yes. And that's not all; the pan flute is called "Whistle of the Wide World", too (Spirit Flute in the US version.)

Iwata

I see. "Whistle of the Wide World".

Aonuma

Not only that, the areas where action takes place are all called "Wide World of the Something", too, so the place where the ocean is is called "Wide World of the Ocean".

Iwata

"Wide World of the Ocean"...?

Aonuma

"Wide World", even though it's ocean (laughs).

Iwamoto

They told us that "Wide World of the Ocean" was weird, no matter how you look at it, but we wanted all the names to match.

(Editor's note: In the North American version the Wide Worlds are called 'Realms' as in 'Ocean Realm')

Iwata

By the way, about the "Whistle of the Wide World" pan flute... Why is it that every The Legend of Zelda game has some sort of sound item in it? I've wondered about it for years. Is it because the sound staff is in on making the puzzles, too?

**Iwamoto**

There isn't a sound item in every game. There wasn't one in the last one.

Iwata

Oh, that's right. There was one in The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina and in The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, but I suppose there isn't always something.

Aonuma

As you'd expect, when the sound team takes a firm line and tells us, "We want to try doing this this time", we often do use that as our jumping-off point. So I think that they do feel as though, since it's The Legend of Zelda", we should use some sort of sound item. In this case, the pan flute was brought up fairly early in the game. Then, too, the mike input capabilities are featured pretty prominently in this game, so the two concepts meshed together neatly.

Iwata

There are a lot of places that use the mic, aren't there.

Aonuma

Yes. But if we worked the players too hard, they'd run out of breath.

Iwamoto

Right, please blow gently. (laughs)

Iwata

You don't need to blow hard at all, do you.

Aonuma

No. Then, the sound team worked very hard this time, and there are all sorts of whistle sounds for them to enjoy.

Iwata

What do you mean, all sorts of whistle sounds?

Aonuma

This game also supports tag mode, too. It's made so that you can collect parts for the train.

Iwamoto

In the previous game, we had players collect parts for the ship. You'd wind up with parts you didn't need, and you could exchange those for parts that you hadn't managed to get.

Aonuma

It's a little different this time, though. There are "treasures", and you can collect many different types. Once you've accumulated a set number of a certain sort of treasure, you can exchange those for your train part. Not only that, the things you collect vary from player to player.

Iwamoto

The treasures show up randomly. It's different for every person.

Aonuma

They'll collect most of the things which it's easy for them to collect, but...

Iwata

By using the tag mode of Nintendo DS, or "passing transmissions", they can collect more effectively.

Aonuma

That's it. This train is split into four sections: the train itself, the gun battery, and then the passenger cars and freight cars. You can customize all of them. There are all sorts of different variations to play around with, and one of them is pretty incredible.

Iwamoto

Yeah, that one really is something else. (laughs)

Aonuma

It's really startling. You can customize it into something which makes you think "...This is a train!? No way..." (laughs)

Iwata

And so, the sound of the whistle changes too. (laughs)

Aonuma

Yes it does. The normal train whistle is the usual, low-pitched one, but they'll get to hear some very interesting whistles, too.

Iwamoto

...Some of which will make them think, "This is a whistle? No way..." (laughs)

Aonuma

Well, you can't really call it a train any more, so it doesn't matter if it doesn't sound like a whistle. (laughs) Anyway, that's how much fun you can have with it, so we definitely want them to use tag mode.

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When You Hear 'That Legend of Zelda Sound'

Iwata

By the way, in The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess interview on the "Iwata Asks - Wii Project", the words "essence of The Legend of Zelda" came up quite a lot. How much did the Nintendo DS The Legend of Zelda team talk about The Legend of Zelda theory?

Iwamoto

Well, frankly, not much.

Iwata

But this is very The Legend of Zelda-like. It has that feel to it. Why do you suppose it is that a team can talk about that a lot when they make it, or not talk about it much at all when they make it, and both products turn out to be The Legend of Zelda-like?

Aonuma

It is odd, isn't it.

Iwamoto

But I did think that I didn't want to get too caught up in making it "The Legend of Zelda-like". There was even an argument about how a train didn't really seem to fit with "The Legend of Zelda".

Iwata

Ah, yes, I did hear a little about that. You mean that debate, the one about whether or not it was really all right to have a train in The Legend of Zelda.

Iwamoto

Then people were wondering whether we shouldn't change the train to something else. Still, we talked to the designer, and to all sorts of people, and we ultimately decided to stick with the train. In the first place, everybody has their own idea of what The Legend of Zelda is supposed to be like.

Iwata

Iwamoto-san, if you absolutely had to say what The Legend of Zelda is like, what would you say?

Iwamoto

I wonder...

Aonuma

That's a hard one.

Iwamoto

It really is.

Iwata

Well, I suppose if one could put it into words that easily, there'd be no need for everyone to argue

on and on about what's "The Legend of Zelda-like" and what isn't.

Iwamoto

True. Besides, there are some things we've managed to avoid, in a good way, that we might not be able to avoid any more if we normalized it too much.



Aonuma

Is it all right if the Producer takes a stab at it, then? (laughs)

Iwata

Of course. Mr. Producer, take the floor. (laughs)

Aonuma

Although this isn't an original comment...

Iwata

Not original? Well, at least you're honest (laughs).

Aonuma

Ten years or so ago, the "Hobo Nikkan Itoi Shinbun (Almost Daily Itoi Newspaper)" ran an interview with Miyamoto-san, after he'd made "Ocarina of Time". In that interview, there was a bit that made me think, "Oh, so that's what it was".

Iwata

And you didn't know about the article back when it first came out?

Aonuma

I'd probably read it, but at the time I just thought, "Huh..." (laughs) It's probably because I wasn't directly involved. I read it just after finishing the The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time job, and at the time, I had no idea I'd keep making The Legend of Zelda. Only, I was asked in an interview about the period when I was working on The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time; it had been a while, and I'd forgotten quite a bit, so I reread the article as a sort of review. And then, among the things Miyamoto-san had said, there was something that really made an impression on me.

Iwata

What was that?

Aonuma

He said, "s/3ds/I want people to see that there are no games that compare to this one" (interview in Japanese). The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time was a game where we did things that others would never think to try.

Iwata

That's true. Hearing that they tried to make The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time a game with such an overwhelming presence that no other game could compare, and that they gave it their very best, is incredibly convincing.

Aonuma

That's why we made it so detailed. If we didn't do that much, I thought, the end product wouldn't be really overwhelming, something other people wouldn't do. This already came up earlier, but even with the railroad, we experimented with a lot of things at first. Honestly, if somebody had said, at the beginning, "That's just a pain; let's not bother with it", I wouldn't have been surprised. But doing things simply because you don't know whether or not they'll work until you try them... I think that in itself is...

Iwata

'A thoroughness that others don't even think to attempt', you mean.

Aonuma

Yes, that's it. This time, we were trying for a game that used trains in a way no other game had used them before. So, as Iwamoto-san said before, we had some people asking 'A train in The Legend of Zelda? Are you sure?' But, as far as I'm concerned, trains are just fine. I felt as though, if the train became something that couldn't be portrayed by anything else, then that would be The Legend of Zelda.

**Iwata**

I see.

Aonuma

By the way, Iwata-san, what do you think The Legend of Zelda is?

Iwata

Well, to me... When I'm playing, and I think "Is it even possible to solve this puzzle?", and it's

really giving me trouble, but then something gives me a brainstorm and I solve it, and "that The Legend of Zelda sound" plays... (laughs) When I hear that "You've solved the puzzle" sound, even though I had to work so hard on it, it makes me want to work on the next one right away. To me, that's the essence of The Legend of Zelda.

Aonuma

I think it's the same for us, too.

Iwamoto

Yes, it is.

Iwata

I see. (laughs) When you're developing it, and you're working so hard on it, and worrying over it, and you finally find the perfect way to do something, you hear that sound in your head.

Aonuma

Oh, we do. (laughs)

Iwamoto

It does. (laughs)

Aonuma

When things are really tough, and we come up with an answer right at the last minute, and we decide, "Hey, this is pretty good!", then we all...

Iwata

...hear that sound in our heads. (laughs)

All

(laugh)

Iwata

You know, that "The Legend of Zelda sound" might have left its mark in gaming history.

Aonuma

It sticks in your head.

Iwata

It really does.

Aonuma

We're actually changing it, little by little, but we can't change it too much. If we changed it drastically, it would turn into something completely different, so...

Iwata

No, you absolutely mustn't change that. (laughs) Not that sound, and not the one that plays when you've opened a treasure chest and gotten something good .

Aonuma

You're right, we really can't change those. They're like a venerable restaurant's secret sauce (laugh). ...And we've inherited them.

Iwamoto

We're all careful to protect traditions like those. Nobody's ever suggested trying to change them. I think everybody understands that those are The Legend of Zelda.

Iwata

You know, though, it's funny that the action of making The Legend of Zelda itself is a lot like solving the puzzles in The Legend of Zelda.

Aonuma

I thought it was pretty good, if I do say so myself. (laughs)

Iwamoto

Did you hear that sound inside your head?

Aonuma

Yes. (laughs)

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New Puzzles and Drama

Aonuma

In Spirit Tracks, I think the staff properly absorbed their own definitions of what The Legend of Zelda is, and created new ways of playing while protecting past traditions.

Iwamoto

It's the same with the subplayer's puzzles.

Aonuma

The person who thought up the subplayer puzzles was another former programmer, like Director Iwamoto. The puzzles that planner thought up are games that make you use different parts of your brain than usual.

Iwata

At EAD, there are lots of planners who came from Design - such as Miyamoto-san, Tezuka-san, and you, Aonuma-san - and relatively few people from Programming, aren't there. Do you think the puzzles are different from the usual ones precisely because someone from Programming thought them up?

Aonuma

I do. They're clearly different. And, when I tried them, I felt, "Oh, I see! I never would have thought of this!" many, many times.

Iwata

And I think, once the people playing the game have solved those, they'll be able to think, "Hey, check it out! How smart am I, huh!?" That's one of the best parts about the puzzles in The Legend of Zelda.

Aonuma

But there was one place that I just could not manage to solve. We were still in development, so I thought, "It's probably a bug", and I went to the planner and said, "This isn't solvable, is it." And he said, coolly, "No, it is." (laughs)

Iwata

I bet that was pretty mortifying. (laughs)

Aonuma

So, during the final half, things sort of turned into a battle of wits between the planner and myself. (laughs) I said, "I am absolutely going to solve this!"

Iwata

That's probably exactly what he wanted. (laughs)

Aonuma

But they really do make you use your head in different ways. I was a Liberal Arts man, so maybe I feel it more strongly because of that. In any case, I think you can look forward to puzzles the

likes of which you've never seen.

Iwata

This time, they've added Science puzzles, you mean.

Aonuma

Right. (laughs)

Iwata

Well now, is there anything you feel you just have to tell the players about The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks?

Aonuma

Quite a lot of women played the previous game, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass...

Iwata

And actually, if you look at the registration on Club Nintendo, although The Legend of Zelda series has traditionally had more of a male audience, on the Nintendo DS, it seems as though lots of women are also enjoying it.

Aonuma

In fact, my wife's played it all the way through to the end. She doesn't play video games very much, but even so, she plugged away at it all by herself, all the way through. So I'd really like it if women would play this game too. When I took the game to have it play tested, I asked for "people who really weren't acquainted with The Legend of Zelda", and they had a female staff member from the same department play it. And she wrote in her report, "I didn't know that playing The Legend of Zelda could give you such a sense of achievement. There were times when it made me want to say 'All right! I did it!'" Of course, she might have been saying some of it out of consideration for the staff, but still.



Iwata

One of The Legend of Zelda software's biggest features is that great sense of achievement, and she had actually played the game when she said that; I really don't think she was just being nice.

Aonuma

That's true. She also said that, although the puzzles were a bit hard, even when she couldn't

solve one on the first try, she didn't feel averse to taking another shot at it. She wrote that in her report as well. Since that's exactly what The Legend of Zelda is trying for, I thought I'd really like women to try playing this game as well. Although I guess trains do have a bit of a little-boy feel about them...

Iwamoto

But I hear there are a lot of female railroad fans out there.

Aonuma

Are there? Well, that's all right, then. (laughs)

All

(laugh)

Iwata

What about you, Iwamoto-san?

Iwamoto

I mentioned this a little while ago, too, but I think there are some people who may feel that trains and The Legend of Zelda don't really mix. If you try it, though, you'll see that it really is The Legend of Zelda-like.

Iwata

It has the essence of The Legend of Zelda.

Iwamoto

Yes. I think, at this point, the game couldn't exist without that train. Also, when playing The Legend of Zelda, people tend to clear one dungeon and rush straight on to the next one, playing as though speed were the important thing. I'd like them to slow down a bit; don't rush straight through it. Take detours and side roads while you play.



Iwata

By taking detours, they'll actually be able to enjoy a denser, richer The Legend of Zelda.

Iwamoto

That's right. By using the train to move around, the world just keeps expanding; they can enjoy

all sorts of events in all sorts of places, and get to know more and more about that world.

Aonuma

Actually, they'll get to see various dramatic developments at those events. We've also put in a lot of elements for grownups, so I think women will be able to enjoy the game for that reason, too. Can I say one more thing?

Iwata

Sure, go ahead.

Aonuma

In the last game, we used Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection and made a complete strategy game which you played one-on-one. But then lots of players told us, "It's too hard". I actually battled everybody else, too, and I didn't win much either.

Iwata

Even the producer couldn't win? (laughs)

Aonuma

The mechanics of the game were incredibly fun, but it really was too hard. So this time, we made things a bit more action-oriented and created something people can really get excited about playing.

Iwata

This time they'll be able to play with the people around them, right?

Aonuma

That's right. It uses local wireless, and up to four people can play.

Iwamoto

If one person has the game card, the other players can play via download.

Aonuma

So, whenever people get together, like at New Year's, they can download it and just have fun.

Iwamoto

Basically, it's a game where everybody tries to get the Force to win, but with this particular concept, as with "Mario Kart", they can get all hyper and excited as a group. So we put in lot of things where you can make a comeback with one shot, or get an item and turn the tables completely.

Aonuma

For example, the strongest Phantom shows up, and even as you're running around trying to get away from him, you can actually lure him towards you, and send him at one of your friends...

Iwata

So you send him at each other and intercept each other to get the Force.

Aonuma

That's it. (laughs) We've let them have their heads a bit more this time, and they can get all hyper and really have fun when they play, so I'd like them to play it with their friends.

Iwata

In other words, when a few people with Nintendo DS system's get together, they've now got one more way to have fun. By the way, Aonuma-san, doesn't this game have a really great feel to it, too?

Aonuma

Yes. It feels as though we did the absolute best we could possibly do in that short production period. Even though we used up the first year on the railroad issue... I feel as though people are going to talk about how, for a producer, I've got no talent for planning...

Iwata

But it's because you worked so hard during that year that it took the shape it has now.

Aonuma

I do think so. But this experience showed me very, very clearly that once you start a train to move, it's incredibly hard to stop it. (laugh)

All

(laugh)

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